

# THE B. B. Y. C. AND THE BARNACLE

by William M. Straight, M.D.

"This Spring of 1887 it was apparent that the Bay could provide all the boats necessary for a yacht race, and it was decided to celebrate Washington's Birthday with an open regatta."

Thus, Commodore Ralph Munroe relates the beginning of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club (B.B.Y.C.), second oldest yacht club in the south and Dade County's oldest social institution.

The earliest mention of the name appears in the diary of Mary Barr Munroe, the first wife of the writer of boys' stories, Kirk Munroe. On February 14, 1887, she notes: "In the evening the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club regatta meet (sic) at the Scrububs . . . Mr. Hine Mr. G. O. H. Mr. Ralph (Ralph Middleton Munroe) and Kirk (Munroe)." That night at the Scrububs, the home of Kirk Munroe on property today just north of the Ransom School the first sailing regatta on the Bay was planned. The regatta held eight days later was a great success with fifteen entries followed by dinner at the Peacock Inn with fifty guests.

One afternoon later that spring at the Peacock Inn, Kirk Munroe suggested the organization of a yacht club to Ralph Munroe and they launched it forthwith. Kirk nominated Ralph as Commodore and Ralph nominated Kirk as Secretary and the club was under way. Apparently the matter rested here until the following winter when this two-man steering committee sent out invitations and on the night of February 18, 1888,

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fourteen men met at the Scrububs to complete the formal organization.

During its early years the B.B.Y.C. held many of its meetings and social events on the second floor of the Commodore's boathouse at the Barnacle. According to Mary Munroe it was here on February 20, 1889, that, "the

Bay. In 1901 the B.B.Y.C. constructed its first clubhouse on pilings along the north side of this pier. This 40 x 25 foot, two-story, frame building had a kitchen and game room on the first floor and an office, storeroom, spacious lounge and a wide verandah overlooking the Bay on the second floor. Mrs.

as headquarters," the Commodore tells us. In 1925 the property on which the Factory stood was sold and the club members at that time being more oriented toward Miami, abandoned the Grove clubhouse. The building was sold for one dollar to Bob Erwin, a local contractor, who moved it by barge to a site on Hardee Avenue where it stands today as a private residence.

In that year the downtown clubhouse was taken down to permit the filling that created Bayfront Park. For a time the B.B.Y.C. met at various places in the downtown area and finally in 1932, through the efforts of Commodore Hugh Matheson, Sr., the club returned to the Grove and built its present clubhouse at 2540 South Bayshore Drive.



On February 20, 1889, the flag of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club was flown for the first time at the Commodore's boathouse at the Barnacle. Photo © Munroe Collection, 1977.

big flag of the Club (was) flown for the first time — saluted by gun and cheer."

As an auxiliary clubhouse the B.B.Y.C. leased the Cape Florida Lighthouse at a dollar a year from July, 1888, until July, 1892. Chowder parties and meetings were held there and it was through the concern and efforts of the club members that erosion was curbed and the lighthouse preserved.

In the winter of 1890-91 the Commodore and associates organized The Biscayne Manufacturing Company to engage in the canning of pineapples grown on the Keys. On the shore a distance south of the boathouse they built the Factory building and a pier extending out into the

Patty Catlow, the Commodore's daughter, recalls she learned to play billiards sitting on the clubhouse stairs watching the club members in the game room. This building was the scene of meetings and social gatherings from 1901 until April, 1926.

As the City of Miami grew, "Mr. (Henry M.) Flagler was anxious to give the club a fine house in the new city in return for the dignity of its name, age, and associations . . . the club built a second house at Miami (a one store building on pilings in the Bay at the foot of the present Northeast First Street and along Bayshore Drive, later renamed Biscayne Boulevard), with Mr. Flagler's help, but retained the old house at the Grove

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portable cruising boats off soundings and coastwise. Their shallow draft allowed the hulls to lift and be buoyed up by the waves and currents. Add to this the simplicity of arrangements and equipment, rigging and sails. One had a beautifully maneuverable boat even when single handed.

It is interesting and timely that this charming and informative little book has returned when it seems that a much greater interest in shoal draft has appeared in the sailboat world.

I knew Vincent Gilpin from childhood, and delightful memories come back to me. It could be said that he was almost a second father to my brother and me. Memories of our family boats cruising together; the companionship, experiences, fair weather and foul. The glorious moonlight sails on Wabun with happy company. The all-day trip down the Bay, fishing or crawling, or just swimming and beach combing. Vincent was always very generous with inviting folks for a sail. He was happy and jolly and his hearty, infectious laugh still rings in my ears.

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